

hazarded: "You are doubtless the same 'Winnie' of whom he used to tell me so much?"

She nodded, her eyes still upon him wistfully.

"But Major Van Twiller is fond of you, surely!" Wooster added. "He has raised no opposition?"

"Not exactly," she said. "He—he can be so stern, you know, and he strictly forbade any wedding till Frank should not only engage in some business enterprise, but operate it successfully for a year."

"And the business, as yet, is only six months old?"

"Seven and a quarter," she corrected.

"H'm—and Frank never told me what the business was, or where."

"No. He hasn't told anyone, not even me," she admitted. "He wishes to surprise us all."

Wooster smiled, in momentary forgetfulness of his own predicament. "I think success is assured him, in that respect at least," he said. "But aside from that, I trust you will kindly accept my heartfelt congratulations. I know old Frank so well, and I like him so well! If it hadn't been for Frank I never should have known—known any of his family," he ended with a sickly smile, for his glance had fallen on a hard accusing gaze from across the room where Major Van Twiller was watching him angrily.

"Thank you very much indeed," said the voice of the new little Mrs. Van Twiller at his side. "You will understand, I know, why I hoped you might be able to tell me something more of Frank than I should wish to ask of anybody else."

Wooster was recalled to the situation of his friend's affairs. "I wish I could," he said honestly; "but I'm quite at sea. And I shall have to ask you to excuse me now, I fear. I'm glad we've met, very glad indeed."

He rose and bowed himself away, unable longer to endure the look that his host continued to bend upon him. Incidentally he beheld Aileen, cornered by the ever-persistent Lord Tutlow, who, as Nelson well knew, never addressed her but to pay her fulsome compliments and attempt a wooing, from which Wooster was certain any sensible American woman would recoil. This scene, however, effected him slightly, if at all. More personal concerns occupied his entire attention.

He approached Major Van Twiller, once more to declare his wish to leave, but his hostess emerged from a near-by door and stopped him with her fan. "It is my turn now," she said to him archly. "You see, Nelson, what a penalty you must expect to pay when you make the older women envious of youth."

She took his arm and guided him back to the ball-room, smiling at her husband as they went.

It was all a torture, all a travesty of joyousness, to Wooster, who nevertheless put it through, he knew not how.

He danced again with Aileen, a waltz, holding her lightly in his arms. The moments, far from being those of ecstasy and abandonment, were fraught with discomfort to both. They hardly spoke; there was nothing to say in such a place; and both were aware of the gaze of those hard gray eyes relentlessly upon them from the door where Major Van Twiller boiled with increasing indignation.

"You know how your father feels, of course?" said Nelson at last.

"Yes," she answered faintly. "It makes me feel horribly ill."

They danced on, to the strains of rapturous music.

"Dearest," said Aileen at length, "I want you to know that I loved you before, with all my heart—and this has only made me love you more."

He saw that tears were in her eyes. His heart gave a great leap of gladness that nothing could have quelled. "It must come out all right," he said. "But—I'd do it all again, for this!"

And when at length he made his escape, the one sweet memory remaining in his mind, despite the confusion of a thousand thoughts, humiliations and despairs, was whispered again in the voice of Aileen.

CHAPTER IV.

WOOSTER awoke the following morning with a bitter taste in all his being. Between dreams and reality he almost had fancied that all was well, that fuller consciousness would swiftly dissipate his troubles and restore his happiness of mind. But his habitual clearness of thought returned to him presently, revealing a hundred ugly features of the night's complications that he had not realized before.

What manner of business it was in which Aileen had been engaged, was his principal mystification. At times he was nearly betrayed into doubts of her motives, her connection with the wretched affair. This was the culmination of his own unhappiness. He could suffer the shame of Major

Van Twiller's accusations and suspicions with comparative ease; but what consolation could be left him if Aileen was guilty of some indiscretion, some dreadful mistake? She had called it a question of life and death. Did she mean her own life? Had she meant to intimate that, were her secret revealed, she would take her life?

He thrust this latter thought away as shameful not only to her, but as well to himself. In a lover's reactionary mode of thought he flouted his own worthiness and loyalty, he scorned his own recreant heart. Nevertheless that fiendish little suggestion persisted, and the man was wrung correspondingly.

He made an attempt to eat his breakfast, but failed. What he should do, he could not determine. The aspect of the entire affair, from Major Van Twiller's point of view, he appreciated thoroughly and painfully. It was now concerning the things that must follow that he thought, and must keep on thinking.

What would happen this afternoon and tomorrow? To all intents and purposes he was already a prisoner out on parole. What could prevent his arrest and disgrace when he next came face to face with the Major? Vaguely the memory of what Aileen had said—that she could not let anything happen to him—returned to his mind, but not reassuringly. Some powerful motive had sealed her lips, at the moment most vital to his honor. What reason could he have for supposing that the motive would presently cease to affect her kindest intentions?

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What could he say to his host? Nothing, absolutely nothing! And what could he expect therefore? He laughed aloud, harshly. Sternness, implacability, fanatic sense of justice, even to cruelty, had been the dominant motives of Major Van Twiller's life. With no lack of capacity for love and fondness in his nature, the iron-minded old soldier nevertheless would have spared neither friend nor child nor self, where a point of honor stood demanding judgment. No, there was nothing to look for there, except extremity of sentence.

Wooster burned at this, for the thought of being actually arrested, to say nothing of being arraigned as a thief, brought a sense of loathing and shrinking upon him that made him positively ill. It could not go so far as this! But what could prevent such a climax? He could not speak, and the Major would never relent, by so much as a jot. There was only Aileen remaining—would she avert the shame? That was the one slender hope he had left. And if she should speak, would what she had to say involve herself? If so, the situation would be worse. And to some extent, no matter how the case was viewed, Aileen was responsible for what had occurred. How terribly vivid was his memory of the voice in which she had called it a case of life and death!

The man was confounded, the more he thought. To and fro he paced, up and down his room, till

PAPA

By Frank Putnam

My folks have set off for the country
And left me to go it alone;
With a score of last words and of kisses
From several car windows thrown;

And a hundred and one last instructions
Concerning the house and the yard;
With a final grand family chorus:
"Be careful, and don't work too hard."

I'm to look after Jimmy's pet rabbit;
And to trim Helen's roses with care;
And to tend Will's tomatoes; and daily
To flood every room with fresh air;

And to take in the milk every morning;
And to keep the ice covered; and not
To forget to make sure to be certain
To—to—humph! I've already forgot.

Well, well, they are now in Ohio,
And speeding on into the West;
While a strange and unusual quiet
Is lulling my senses to rest.

An east wind blows in from Atlantic
With a breath that is foggy and chill,
And only the tops of the pine trees
Loom out of the mist on the hill;

But in Morris chair here by the fire
That crackles and glows on the grate
I'm taking my ease, with a book on my knees,
As I haven't done often, of late.

nearly ten o'clock. He wondered at last about his business engagements. It was not until then that he suddenly remembered Teddy Winkle, the little chap he had promised to be with at the hospital later in the morning.

He left the house at once, and was driven to the Agnes Mason Refuge, where to his surprise he learned that the surgeon engaged to perform the operation on his little friend had altered his plans and taken Teddy to another institution. Wooster was soon on hand, in the ward where the child had been placed. Half an hour later the operation was begun, Wooster remaining in the larger room away from the scene, with Teddy's mother.

It was not until nearly noon that the surgeon summoned him to Teddy's side, and then he was quietly informed that coma threatened the frail spark of life remaining in the small patient's body. With the doctors and nurses Wooster wrought in desperation to coax back the little life.

All afternoon he remained with the others, his anguish of mind increasing as the work seemed to become so futile and hope so slender. It was after a shadowy consciousness had returned to the still child that Wooster's services became invaluable, for he alone of all the company present could persuade the little man to try to live; he alone could awaken the child's desire to reassume the burden of existence. At six o'clock in the evening the surgeon had expended his final effort. He had no more resources at command. Wooster was told that on him depended the little fellow's recovery. He must warm him back to life.

He was slowly winning the fight, and singing some sort of comfort that the weary childish brain could grasp, when a nurse came softly to his side and informed him that a man had come, who wished to see him alone in the office below. It was fully an hour after that before he left his post, and then to his intense relief, the surgeon, after looking at the face of little Ted, turned abruptly to shake him by the hand.

"I think you'd better leave him now," he said. "You needn't worry any longer—you've won!"

Weak from sheer loss of vitality, Wooster said good-night to them all and went down-stairs to the room where his visitor was waiting. He found a man with small, sharp eyes and a clean-shaven face, blue with the thickness of beard that could not be wholly effaced.

"Well?" said Nelson. "My name is Wooster."

"I'm on," replied the man; "but it took me something of a spell to find out where you was. Mr. Van Twiller asked me to look you up and tell you he's waitin' to see you on important biz."

"I'll go at once," said Wooster. "Thank you."

He left the place, followed at a distance by the man. As soon as he could he procured a cab and was driven rapidly to the Van Twiller mansion. The man did likewise and entered the place, as if by arrangement, at the door in the rear of the house.

CHAPTER V.

THE clock in the Van Twiller study was striking nine when Wooster came in the room and found himself facing the stony glare of the Major's eyes.

Since four o'clock the older man had waited. During all that time, by a hundred clever subterfuges, Aileen had contrived to escape, first her mother, then her dinner, and finally a theater engagement, to remain behind the curtain, from the cover of which she had watched previously and overheard the scene between her father and Nelson. Her mother had gone at last to the play, with a friend. Aileen was at her post when Wooster came.

"Five hours behind your promised time!" commented the Major, without so much as the pretense of a greeting. "Moreover, you deceived me as to the name of the hospital at which your alleged friend was lying."

"The doctor made the change this morning," answered Wooster. "I had no intention of deceiving you, Major Van Twiller, in what I told you before."

"Well, it took a good detective a long while to find you and 'phone me results," replied his host. "It looks unfavorable, to say the least. And I warned you to be here on the minute. I hope you know what to expect."

"Major, I trust that at the end of this affair you may somehow escape such a mortification as you have put upon me, in employing this detective," said Wooster, flushing with indignation.

The older man elevated his brows. "Indeed!" said he. "H'm. The end of this affair, you said. What do you mean? Come, sir, you were granted this moment in which to make some sort of a possible explanation. Out with it, while my patience lasts a moment longer! What did you mean by that remark?"

"I meant nothing," Wooster hastened to say,

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